

The Crucible – Elizabeth and John: Voice the Subtext – Act II (excerpt)

The common room of Proctor's house, eight days later.

At the right is a door opening on the fields outside. A fireplace is at the left, and behind it a stairway leading upstairs. It is the low, dark and rather long living room of the time. As the curtain rises, the room is empty. From above, Elizabeth is heard softly singing to the children. Presently the door opens and John Proctor enters, carrying his gun. He glances about the room as he comes toward the fireplace, then halts for an instant as he hears her singing. He continues on to the fireplace, leans the gun against the wall as he swings a pot out of the fire and smells it. Then he lifts out the ladle and tastes. He is not quite pleased. He reaches to a cupboard, takes a pinch of salt, and drops it into the pot. As he is tasting again, her footsteps are heard on the stair. He swings the pot into the fireplace and goes to a basin and washes his hands and face. Elizabeth enters.

ELIZABETH: What keeps you so late? It's almost dark.

PROCTOR: I were planting far out to the forest edge.

ELIZABETH: Oh, you're done then.

PROCTOR: Aye, the farm is seeded. The boys asleep?

ELIZABETH: They will be soon. *(And she goes to the fireplace, proceeds to ladle up stew in a dish.)*

PROCTOR: Pray now for a fair summer.

ELIZABETH: Aye.

PROCTOR: Are you well today?

ELIZABETH: I am. *(She brings the plate to the table, and, indicating the food.)* It is a rabbit.

PROCTOR: *(Going to the table.)* Oh, is it! In Jonathan's trap?

ELIZABETH: No, she walked into the house this afternoon; I found her sittin' in the corner like she come to visit.

PROCTOR: Oh, that's a good sign walkin' in.

ELIZABETH: Pray God. It hurt my heart to strip her, poor rabbit. *(She sits and watches him taste it.)*

PROCTOR: It's well seasoned.

ELIZABETH: *(Blushing with pleasure.)* I took great care. She's tender?

PROCTOR: Aye. *(He eats. She watches him.)* I think we'll see green fields soon. It's warm as blood beneath the clods.

ELIZABETH: That's well.

PROCTOR: (*Proctor eats then looks up.*) If the crop is good I'll buy George Jacob's heifer. How would that please you?

ELIZABETH: Aye, it would.

PROCTOR: (*With a grin.*) I mean to please you, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: *It is hard to say.* I know it, John.

He gets up, goes to her, kisses her. She receives it. With a certain disappointment, he returns to the table.

PROCTOR: (*As gently as he can.*) Cider?

ELIZABETH: (*With a sense of reprimanding herself for having forgot.*) Aye! (*She gets up and goes and pours a glass for him. He now arches his back.*)

PROCTOR: This farm's a continent when you go foot by foot droppin' the seeds in it.

ELIZABETH: (*coming with the cider*) It must be.

PROCTOR: (*drinks a long draught, then, putting the glass down*) You ought to bring some flowers in the house.

ELIZABETH: Oh! I forgot! I will tomorrow.

PROCTOR: It's winter in here yet. On Sunday let you come with me, and we'll walk the farm together; I never see such a load of flowers on the earth. (*With good feeling he goes and looks up at the sky through the open window.*) Lilacs have a purple smell. Lilac is the smell of nightfall, I think. Massachusetts is a beauty in the spring!

ELIZABETH: Aye, it is.

There is a pause. She is watching him from the table as he stands there absorbing the night. It is as though she would speak but cannot. Instead, now, she takes up his plate and glass and fork and goes with them to the sink. Her back is turned to him. He turns to her and watches her. A sense of their separation rises.